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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000253

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SUBJECT: ANBAR REPRESENTATIVE DISCUSSES PROVINCIAL POLITICS

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor Charles O. Blaha
per 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Amr Abdulsittar, a Sunni Tawafiq bloc Council of representatives (CoR) member from Anbar, met with Poloffs on January 22 to discuss the situation in Anbar. He claimed Anbaris view Al Qaeda as a tool of Iran and as in cooperation with the United States. Abdulsittar expressed concern about the Salvation Council headed by Sheikh Sattar Abu Risha because he said it controls a militia. If the Salvation Council is not dealt with officially, he warned, the problems of its militia will remain after Al Qaeda is dealt with. Abdulsittar said he is in contact with the Governor and Provincial Council and urged more Coalition support for the province's elected leaders. END SUMMARY.

Establishing His Bona Fides

¶2. (C) Abdulsittar opened the discussion by explaining that he represents Ramadi, although he has not lived there for over a year. He said he maintains contact with the Anbar Provincial Council, the city councils, and individuals there, but it is difficult because of the security situation. Abdulsittar said his familial ties and work as a doctor have enabled him to establish relationships throughout the province. (Comment: PolOffs believe Abdulsittar to be perhaps the only CoR representative from Anbar who maintains contacts with the province and is active in the CoR.)

Al Qaeda: Funded By Iran, Cooperating With the US

¶3. (C) Abdulsittar said security, services, the economy, and social issues are his primary areas of concern. He said people in Al Anbar view Al Qaeda and Jaysh al-Mehdi (JAM) as two sides of the same coin because, people believe, they are both Shia militias funded by Iran. Abdulsittar said Iran funds and creates plans for Al Qaeda and JAM to marginalize Sunni Arabs. He said Anbaris believe Iran was happy when Sunnis boycotted politics, and now that Sunnis are involved, Iran is using proxies to fight them. He commented that there is much evidence showing that Iraq has become a battlefield between Washington and Tehran. Abdulsittar said Anbaris think Al Qaeda has American, Iranian, Syrian, and Iraqi parts. He continued that the situation in Anbar has reached a point where Anbaris think there is cooperation between the Americans and Al Qaeda because the Americans have not gotten rid of the group yet. He says that claims that the Americans cannot beat Al Qaeda do not make sense when MNF-I captures and then releases top Al Qaeda leaders.

Outlines Major Problems in Anbar

¶4. (C) In addition to Al Qaeda, Abdulsittar said he perceived

three major problems in Anbar: unemployment, destroyed homes, and displaced families. He said Anbaris are poor and many are unemployed, many houses have been destroyed by MNF-I operations, and some 2,700 families are reportedly displaced from inside Ramadi. Abdulsittar said that addressing these problems would help fight Al Qaeda because their resolutions would have resonance with the youth and others in Anbar that feed Al Qaeda's recruitment.

The Salvation Council is not the Solution

¶15. (C) Abdulsittar said tribal sheikhs have a place in society and deserve respect, but they are not statesmen. He emphasized he was not speaking specifically about Salvation Council leader Sheikh Sattar Abu Risha but said Iraqis should not depend on people who are thieves and bandits.

Abdulsittar then addressed Sheikh Sattar more specifically, saying the groups related to him are militias. He said the use of force should be the prerogative of the state and cautioned Poloffs not to repeat the mistake of allowing "another JAM" to develop in Anbar. Abdulsittar claimed Al Qaeda members have joined Sheikh Sattar's forces to get money and weapons and to avoid capture. He relayed that he had heard that 70 percent of the attendees at the meeting hosted by Sheikh Sattar on January 10 were Al Qaeda members.

¶16. (C) Abdulsittar stressed that the Anbar Provincial Council is an official, elected body while the Salvation Council is an unofficial body, and yet, the GOI is more responsive to the Salvation Council than the Provincial Council. He said the Provincial Council permitted eight Salvation Council members to join it. He complained that the Provincial

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Council must travel to Baghdad to visit the Ministers with their requests and usually do not receive responses for months, but the Salvation Council members can get things done quickly with a couple of phone calls. Abdulsittar concluded by saying the Salvation Council must be dealt with officially or it will be a problem after Anbaris deal with Al Qaeda.

Anbar Provincial Council Needs Support

¶17. (C) Abdulsittar said MNF-I and the Anbar Provincial Council need to have a strong relationship and to coordinate with each other to root out Al Qaeda in Anbar. He said the Provincial Council needs MNF-I protection to do many of its projects; if there is security, people will be encouraged and will participate. He said the relationship between American troops and Iraqis in Habbaniyah is a good example to emulate. Abdulsittar asked for MNF-I to trust the Provincial Council when it requests for detainees to be released, saying these are innocent people. He added, "We will bring you the bad guys." Abdulsittar recommended that MNF-I should not use group punishment, such as bombing a village where a terrorist is residing, because this mass punishment only sparks anger against the Americans. He told Poloffs that Anbar Provincial Council members, who have been meeting in the Green Zone, want badges for Green Zone access, but currently only three members have them.

¶18. (C) Abdulsittar brought up the Anbar Reconstruction Council, which was started in 2004 and is linked to the Ministry of Industry and Minerals (MOIM). He said this council should be linked to the Provincial Council, not the MOIM, to be more effective. He characterized the committee as currently holding meetings but not getting anything done.

¶19. (C) Abdulsittar said he has a good relationship with Governor Mamun Sami Rashid, who he mentioned used to be the President of the Engineer's Association. He said he also has a good relationship with Provincial Council Chairman

Abdalsalam Abdullah, who is a fellow doctor. Abdulsittar added the two have familial ties as well because his cousin is married to one of Abdalsalam,s brothers. He said he passes requests for different projects from his constituents to the Governor and the Provincial Council.

Bio Note

¶10. (C) Abdulsittar is an Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) member. He is a doctor and used to be Director General for health in Anbar after Operation Iraqi Freedom. His grandparents are from Ramadi, and his father is a tribal sheikh. Abdulsittar lived in Ramadi from 1990 to 2005, but he has not returned since October 2005 because he was put on a terrorist hit list after appearing on television calling for people to vote in the constitutional referendum. He understands and speaks some English.

KHALILZAD